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SUBJECT: Party's 13th Plenum Finalizes Party Documents,  
Makes Only Minor Headway on Personnel Decisions

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HCMC 1155

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¶1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Able to decide only on a "long list" of possible candidates for the next Central Committee, participants in the Communist Party of Vietnam's 13th Plenum have put off to a 14th and final plenum the ultimate decision on Central Committee membership. At the plenum, a number of current high-level Party officials reportedly received few votes of confidence for retaining their membership in the Central Committee. Key Party documents and proposed changes to Party Statutes were also discussed and approved. Although rumors abound about possible senior leadership changes, it is still too early to tell who will be in or out. The upcoming Tet Lunar New Year holiday -- at which senior Party leaders meet to exchange greetings -- will likely be the occasion to make important personnel decisions. End Summary and Comment.

No Decision On Next Central Committee Lineup  
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¶2. (SBU) The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) met January 11-18 to review candidates for the next Central Committee, which will be approved and launched by this spring's National Party Congress. Senior Colonel Tran Nhung, former chief of the international affairs division of "Quan Doi Nhan Dan" (People's Army) newspaper, told us that participants in the 13th Plenum tried but failed to approve a short list of candidates to the next Central Committee. They instead reached consensus on a "long list" of 280 possible candidates, which will be reviewed during the 14th (and final) Plenum, reportedly scheduled for February 15. Of these 280, the current Central Committee will certify a list of some 190 persons (160 full-time members and some 20-30 alternates without voting rights). This list will be forwarded to the Party Congress for its imprimatur. Although no firm date has been set, the word on the street is that the Congress will be held in April.

¶3. (SBU) Nhung noted that the CPV usually convenes only thirteen plenums during a five-year term of a particular Central Committee. However, because they foresaw possible difficulties in nailing down personnel decisions, participants in the 12th Plenum agreed that there would be one more (14th) plenum right before the

Party Congress. This additional plenum and the time it allows for further discussions will hopefully avoid possible Party "disability" ahead of the Congress, Nhung explained.

14. (SBU) According to Vietnam History Institute Director Ngo Van Hoa, retiring Central Committee members often have some surprises in store when it comes to the debate on who will remain in the new Central Committee. Those facing the end of their political careers have more courage to speak their "real thoughts." Based on the last two terms of the Central Committee, around one-third of the current membership will be replaced, Hoa predicted.

Leadership Changes: Scenarios abound  
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15. (SBU) Local observers have claimed that Party progressives, particularly southerners, support a Party leadership change scenario in which HCMC Party Secretary Nguyen Minh Triet replaces current CPV

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General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, with Manh becoming State President and Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan rising to the post of Prime Minister. Conservative elements, on the other hand, reportedly would like to see CPV Personnel and Organization Commission chief Tran Dinh Hoan become the Party Secretary or State President.

16. (SBU) Describing one "progressive scenario," the History Institute's Hoa noted that the 13th Plenum again stipulated that Politburo members should not be older than 65 years of age. This means that only six of the current 14 Politburo members are eligible for continued service. They are: Party Secretary Nong Duc Manh, HCMC Party Secretary Nguyen Minh Triet, Hanoi Party Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, Standing Deputy Prime

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Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, CPV Economics Commission chief Truong Tan Sang and Minister of Public Security Le Hong Anh. Of them, HCMC Party Secretary Triet is apparently being strongly backed by the Party's "progressive faction," which includes former Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet, to be the new Party General Secretary, Hoa said. (A contact close to Kiet told

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ConGen HCMC January 27 that the Party tradition that the General Secretary hail from the north, the President from the center and the Prime Minister from the south is not a factor in ongoing Party personnel deliberations. A second contact in HCMC derided Nong Duc Manh and was more optimistic in a recent meeting about prospects for the Kiet wing of the Party to prevail in both policy and personnel decisions.)

17. (SBU) Elaborating on Triet's progressive credentials, Hoa reported that, at the recent HCMC Party Congress, Triet supported certain aspects of "political change." For example, he bucked Party norms by allowing free nominations, as well as self-nominations, to key Party positions. He also refused to put forward names endorsed by the CPV Commission for Personnel and Organization. Such "political change" must have been strongly supported by former Prime Minister Kiet, who himself has reportedly demanded free nominations to key Party positions during past Party Congresses. (Note: Last October, local observers noted with interest a letter reportedly written by Kiet, in which he criticized the current system of personnel nominations and selection; that is, Party Congress delegates merely rubber stamp decisions

already made by the Politburo and Central Committee. Kiet claimed that this made the Politburo too powerful, which violates Party Statutes. Kiet also said that he had attended seven Party Congresses since 1951, and that only the 2nd Party Congress in 1951 was conducted in a "truly democratic manner." End Note.)

#### Another Version

18. (SBU) Ngo Cuong, Editor-in-Chief of the Supreme People's Court-affiliated Judicial Journal, quoted his boss and mentor, Supreme People's Court Presiding Justice (and Central Committee member) Nguyen Van Hien, as saying that at least half of the current 14 Politburo members are expected to step down following the Party Congress, including State President Tran Duc Luong, National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Van An, Central Committee Secretariat Standing Member Phan Dien and perhaps even Party Personnel and Organization Commission chief Tran Dinh Hoan. However, the reason for this large-scale retirement would not be age but the results of the 13th Plenum's "vote of confidence" on possible candidates for the next Central Committee. State President Tran Duc Luong received a surprisingly low vote of confidence of only nine percent. Phan Dien received less than 20 percent, while Tran Dinh Hoan himself came in with only 19 percent. Party Chief Nong Duc Manh wound up with a 64 percent vote of confidence, Hien reported.

19. (SBU) Hien also asserted that Central Committee members who attended the 13th Plenum had "shown courage," and that the Plenum was conducted in a "democratic manner." Given the results of the vote, it is likely that a number of current members of the Central Committee will have no chance of remaining for the next Central Committee, Hien said. However, "nobody knows for sure what will happen." That said, it seems certain that Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, Defense Minister Pham Van Tra and CPV Ideology and Culture Commission Chief Nguyen Khoa Diem are preparing to retire, Hien added.

#### Party Documents

110. (SBU) Speaking at the closing session of the 13th Plenum, Party Chief Nong Duc Manh said the Politburo would soon publish the Political Report for comments from Party members as well as citizens. The Political Report is expected to confirm two changes to the Party Statutes that were agreed upon by Central Committee members. They are: 1) Party members are allowed to conduct private economic activities without any limitations on size (and entrepreneurs are allowed to

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become Party members); and, 2) The CPV is the vanguard of the working class as well as the Vietnamese people and nation (as opposed to the current version, which is merely the working class).

111. (SBU) Comment: While the conventional wisdom agrees that PM Khai, Defense Minister Tra and Party Ideology/Culture Commission chief Diem will probably retire, our contacts' versions of possible leadership changes are merely two of several scenarios currently being discussed, rumored or rejected. For example, another rumored scenario has President Luong, National Assembly Chairman An and Party General Secretary Manh switching positions among themselves. It is simply still too early to tell what will happen. In fact, the upcoming Tet Lunar New Year holiday -- during which senior CPV leaders will visit each other's homes for new year's greetings and drinking bouts -- will likely

be the occasion to debate and ultimately decide on senior CPV personnel changes. End Comment.

BOARDMAN